



News of the Network

An update on developments within the
VA Stars & Stripes Healthcare Network (VISN 4)

September 2005

A Message from the Network Director

As you may know, VA's 4th mission is to provide medical and hospital backup to the U.S. Departments of Defense and Homeland Security and the civilian community when national emergencies occur. Unfortunately, such an emergency occurred last month when Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc upon the residents of several southeastern states. Since that time, nearly 300 VISN 4 employees have volunteered to be part of VA's considerable role in the Katrina relief effort. To date, 40 employees have been deployed. They include physicians, psychologists, nurses, pharmacy and patient services staff, and administrative support personnel. Nearly 30 other Network employees are participating via deployments of the military, VA police, or other organizations (e.g., the American Red Cross). In addition, mobile clinics from our Wilkes-Barre and Pittsburgh facilities are providing much-needed clinical support to the affected region, while our medical centers are providing assistance to some displaced patients and workers who have come to this area.

While I am saddened by the terrible toll which this natural disaster has taken, I am heartened by the assistance which VA and VISN 4 employees are providing in Katrina's aftermath.

Charleen R. Szabo, FACHE



MyHealthVet Site Adds Prescription Refill Capability

Veterans who receive their health care at VA facilities within and outside of our Network can now refill prescriptions online through VA's "My HealthVet" (MYHV) Web site. My HealthVet is designed to help veterans (and their families/advocates) partner with health care providers to achieve the best possible health. The site is a one-stop-shop source for health and benefits information. To learn more, visit www.myhealth.va.gov or contact your VA medical center's MYHV program coordinator.

Volunteer Transportation Services for Veterans in Need of VA Health Care



VA Stars & Stripes Healthcare Network

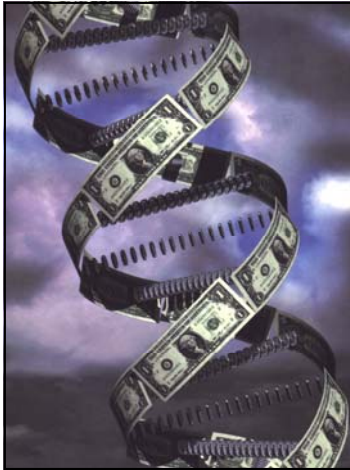


U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

New Publication about Volunteer Transportation Services

A new Network brochure, "Volunteer Transportation Services for Veterans in Need of VA Health Care," has been produced. The publication includes information about how the VA volunteer transportation program works in VISN 4, eligibility for volunteer transportation, and who to contact for more details and assistance. You can access the brochure by visiting our Web site, www.starsandstripes.med.va.gov, or by contacting your local VAMC's voluntary service office

Budget Update



The Veterans Health Administration received a supplemental budget appropriation of \$1.5 billion: \$975 million earmarked for FY 2005 and \$525 million for FY 2006. VISN 4 received nearly \$47 million of these funds, the bulk of which has been allocated to our VAMCs

for specific equipment items and projects. The remainder will be used to help facilities reduce patient waits and delays. At this point, we wouldn't expect any decrease in our FY 2006 budget allocation; however, we also cannot assume any significant increase in funding over the FY 2005 amount.

Latest Issue of *Veterans First* Distributed

The latest issue of our patient newsletter, *Veterans First* (Issue 3-2005), has been released. It includes articles about recent facility improvements, services for returning service members, telemedicine, helping those with Alzheimer's disease, and ScripTalk, a system that helps veterans who have difficulty seeing the information on their medications. The newsletter also mentions important developments taking place at our VAMCs. If you do not receive a copy, you can see it on our Web site, www.starsandstripes.med.va.gov. Feel free to "lift" copy for reuse in any communications you send out to veterans. Please contact Jeff Ostroff at (302) 633-5389 if you have any questions about this.



No Co-Payment for Outpatient Smoking Cessation Counseling

VA's co-payment for outpatient smoking cessation counseling (individual and group) has been eliminated. This will increase access to smoking cessation treatment for all veterans who want to stop using tobacco. The elimination of the outpatient co-payment will be retroactive to May 2, 2005. VA will reimburse all Priority 7 and 8 veterans who had been assessed and paid a co-payment for smoking cessation counseling that was provided on or after May 2.



Returning Veterans Update

As of August 31, VISN 4 facilities had treated over 2,000 returning service members, roughly 600 more than all of FY 2004. At the national level, VA is currently conducting a survey of approximately 2,000 Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operating Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) veterans to assess their overall satisfaction with VA health care. The survey will measure OIF/OEF veterans' general satisfaction with their experiences with VA health care. In addition, it will assess how satisfied returning service members are with the help provided by VA staff during their transition from active duty to the VA system. The projected completion date for the survey and report of its findings is December.

